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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Wednesday, March 2, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "TIPS FOR FOOD SHOPPERS." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture, and the Consumers' Counsel of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

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More news for food-shoppers today. More news for the listener who likes to plan her market list with an eye to current price and supply trends.

The first news tip is about strawberries. The Florida strawberry season swings fully under way in the month of February, you know. And from then on until the last half of March, Florida berries are the fresh strawberries in the markets. Toward the last of March shipments from Louisiana begin. So you can expect to see more and more strawberries on the market from now until May. In May strawberry prices go down to their lowest point for the season.

And speaking of strawberry prices, they have had what the economists call "a marked reduction" since the season began -- a marked reduction in price due to the sharp increase in Florida shipments. This year's Florida crop will probably be a little smaller than last year's, but these smaller total supplies will probably be offset by the fact that the strawberry season this year started late so the shipping season is a month shorter than usual.

Speaking of food bargains from Florida, there's celery. This year's Florida celery crop is making a record. And when there's a record crop, of course, shipments "increase sharply," as the economists express it. The Florida celery crop this year is an eighth larger than a year ago, and growers' prices this year are far below a year ago. Marketings are subject to regulations under an Agricultural Adjustment Administration agreement. Florida produces about one-fifth of the yearly celery supplies. And April is usually the month when the largest amount of this Florida celery goes to market.

If you keep a careful food budget, you may be especially interested to know that the course of food costs in general is expected to continue downward through March. Business conditions will influence how fast food costs change. From last September to the middle of January, retail food costs in the United States dropped 6 and a half percent -- dropped to their lowest level since early 1936. The chief factor behind this down swing of retail food prices is the sharp cut in meat prices.

And beef, egg, and butter prices will probably continue moving down and remain lower than a year ago. Other foods that usually go up in price at this time of year probably won't change much. These foods that are likely to remain very much at their present price are: apples, oranges, poultry, potatoes and lamb. Poultry probably will be the only item in the group retailing higher than a year ago. Two foods are expected to go up in price. These are onions and cabbages. They may go up in price until April or May when new onions and cabbages from the early crops begin coming to market in considerable quantities.

Because the prices of better-grade beef have gone down so rapidly already, they probably will not go down during the next few months as much as the economists expected earlier. During the first week in February choice and prime cattle were selling at less than half the price they were selling for last October, when prices were at their peak. This sharp drop has cut down the margin between prices of top grade and average grade beef. In early February this margin was considerably below average compared with the record size margin last fall. During the coming spring and summer months you can expect seasonal increases in better grade cattle supplies.

The predictions about the price of lamb have changed again. It appears now that prices won't go up much during the next few months and that retail prices of lamb might even ease off a little more. From December through April lamb prices usually move up, but this year they have been going down. And you can expect to find considerably more grain-fed lamb on the market than you found last spring.

As for pork, hog prices are expected to go up during the next few months because less slaughtering goes on at this season. So fresh pork on the market will stop dropping in price -- at least temporarily. But prices of smoked pork will go on dropping because it takes a certain time for a change in the price of live hogs to affect the price of smoked meat.

What about our spring chickens and other poultry? Well, during the next few months there will probably be less fresh-dressed poultry and frozen poultry on the market. Prices probably will continue to be above their last year's level, but the price advance until June may be relatively small. The recent high prices in poultry have been due to the fact that prices went down during the last of 1937 instead of going up as they usually do at that season.

Now about eggs. Egg prices will probably continue going down until they reach the seasonal low point in April or May. Because of mild weather this winter and plenty of feed supplies, egg production has been much heavier than was expected. This has offset the effect of smaller farm flocks. Prices of eggs will stay below what they were a year ago until the middle of spring when they probably will be about the same as last year.

Last news item -- oranges. The middle of February was the time when orange prices were lowest for the season. In the middle of January oranges were selling in retail stores at the lowest price since March 1933. More oranges will be selling in the markets this year than last. Or, as the economists put it, "Supplies are expected to continue above their 1937 level."

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